European Commission

Embedding eTwinning in national educational policies

from practice to policy

Summary Report 2021

eTwinning

Erasmus+

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KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key findings:

- Among the national policies and approaches analysed, eTwinning is embedded in national educational policies to varied degrees, with specificities depending on national contextual factors.
- eTwinning's alignment with the scope and/or the content of national educational policies and curricula, although present in many cases, can be further strengthened to better embed eTwinning in national systems.

- eTwinning is mostly aligned with and supports the implementation of national policies on teachers' professional development, especially for 21st-century skills.
- When involvement in eTwinning is recognised at official level, this may be either formally or non-formally accompanied by a certain type of reward (e.g., salary, promotion, positive non-formal impact on evaluation).
- Some Initial Teacher Education institutions have already included eTwinning in their curricula.
- eTwinning's overall objectives are part of and/or consistent with the national competence-based approach of the curricula.
- eTwinning introduces and promotes innovative pedagogical approaches that foster pupils' participation, motivation and learning, which are key priorities in all countries.
- Internationalisation among pupils, teachers and schools, one of the key assets of eTwinning, is a priority for all the countries analysed.
- eTwinning increases pupils' motivation, energy and commitment for eTwinning projects, but also for other school subjects.

Key recommendations:

- Promoting or referencing eTwinning in national official documents would legitimise the importance of eTwinning among teachers who are less keen to challenge their methodology and teaching practice.
- Enhancing participants' understanding of the links between Erasmus+ and eTwinning, to maximise their impact, through closer cooperation and coordination between the National Erasmus+ Agencies and the National Support Organisations.
- Promoting eTwinning as a bigger "package" in conjunction with other projects and activities would benefit all parties involved.
- Strengthening eTwinning in Initial Teacher Education and initial training for school leaders would prepare future teachers and principals for innovative practices and encourage national policies to accommodate their needs.
- Providing support to eTwinning Ambassadors would facilitate the uptake of eTwinning also at official level, through a bottom-up approach.

1. Introduction

Each year, the annual eTwinning Monitoring Report endeavours to capture the key accomplishments and milestones of eTwinning in relation to various topics, as well as the areas of further development and improvement, to promote eTwinning and support pupils, teachers and schools in an effective way. The current document constitutes the summary report of the eTwinning Monitoring Full Report 2021, which will be available in December 2021.

The focus of the 2021 Monitoring Report is to **investigate the impact of "embedding eTwinning" in national policies on three main areas: professional development and recognition, curriculum integration, and innovative pedagogy**. The notion of "embedding eTwinning" derives from the assumption that eTwinning encompasses a set of both tools and methodologies which can – and should – serve national educational policies and support teachers for their own specific needs. "Embedding" is then seen as a way to **promote, recognise, leverage and further deploy eTwinning at national level**.

The notion of impact has been further operationalised based on the following sub-areas:

Areas	Actions	Impact on:
Professional development and recognition	• Formal integration in the system of teachers' pre-service and in-service career development • Policy framework in collaboration with other partners/actors at national level • Initial Teacher Education	• Teachers' professionalisation in 21st-century skills • Stimulating career development and (re)shaping teachers' image
Curriculum integration	• Teacher-based approach (e.g., own initiative) • School-based approach (e.g., role of school leadership) • Systemic approach (e.g., in textbooks, official curricula)	• Internationalisation of curriculum • Transversal and soft skills • Key competences for teachers and pupils
Innovative pedagogy	• European collaboration • Integration of new pedagogies	• European dimension • Methodological and pedagogical upskilling for schools and teachers • Tackling early leaving

Table 1: Areas of eTwinning's impact on national policies.

The aim of this Report is to:

- explore whether and to what extent eTwinning has been "embedded" in national systems
- identify the challenges that arise in the attempt to embed eTwinning in national policies, as well as the further actions and support needed
- illustrate the impact at systemic level according to policy makers and power users on the three aforementioned areas
- collect evidence of impact at national and European level through the use of focus groups and identify any potential trends and patterns across the countries.

The data obtained for the 2021 qualitative report derive from the results of discussion in eight **focus groups** that were completed in April 2021 and involved eight countries: Finland, France, Greece, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey. The selection criteria reflect both a geographical distribution and the anticipation of evidence in these countries, based on information received in the workshop carried out with the Ministries of Education in the eTwinning Conferences in 2019 and 2020. Each focus group was dedicated to one country and was composed of at least one representative from the national Ministry of Education, the National support Organisation (NSO), an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Institute, a school head, and a power user (eTwinning Ambassador or experienced eTwinner). However, in some focus groups, there were more than one representative from the Ministry and/or the ITE Institution.

Data analysis was performed through content analysis, based on the framework illustrated in Table 1. We created categories and subcategories of the related content by country (data reduction) and looked for potential similarities across data (data clustering). Data were obtained through desk research and input from documents, circulars, regulations at national level and the discussions in the focus groups.

It should then be noted that the summary provided below, although grounded as much as possible on the evidence gathered through desk research, also unavoidably reflects the perceptions of the focus group participants and should be interpreted with this in mind.

The report is structured in four chapters. After this Introduction, Chapter 2 presents the collected evidence on the macro level of the status of embedding eTwinning in the national policies of the countries involved in the study, along with the ongoing challenges and the further actions and support needed. Chapter 3 then illustrates the impact of eTwinning in the three main areas identified earlier. as reflected in the evidence collected through the focus groups and desk research, while in Chapter 4 we conclude with some final remarks and patterns observed.

2. Status and challenges of embedding eTwinning in national policies

eTwinning is a bottom-up initiative that has been launched at a micro level in the school classrooms of 43 European and neighbouring countries by inspired and committed teachers and school heads. However, the 2020 monitoring report[1] on schools awarded the eTwinning School Label acknowledged that further work and aid needs to be in place in order to embed eTwinning activities more effectively in national systems across countries, as it can provide a powerful means of support to national educational policies. The present chapter illustrates some initial evidence on the ways and the challenges of embedding eTwinning, along with the further actions and support that are needed to strengthen eTwinning at a national level.

Based on the data obtained from the focus groups, it can be observed that eTwinning is embedded in national systems and policies at the following two systemic levels, with three distinct approaches (A-D, A-C, B-C):

Macro	(A) Integration within the national Ministry of Education	(B) Integration within a national agency or institution
Meso	(C) Direct links/references to eTwinning	(D) Indirect links/references to eTwinning

Table 2: Levels of eTwinning embedding in national policies.

At a macro level, a factor that reflects the embedding of eTwinning in the national system is the structure of the national scheme in terms of the **position of the National Support Organisation**.[2] In the majority of the countries included in the Report (Finland, France, Spain, Portugal and Turkey), the NSO operates either within

1 Licht, A., Pateraki, I., Scimeca, S., (2020). *eTwinning Schools: towards a shared leadership approach – Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the eTwinning School practices.* Central Support Service of eTwinning – European Schoolnet, Brussels. Available at: https://www.etwinning.net/en/pub/newsroom/research-monitoring/full-report-2020---etwinning-s.htm

2 https://www.etwinning.net/en/pub/support/national-etwinning-support-ser.htm

the Ministry or as an entity under the Ministry with a dedicated eTwinning team, while in the remaining countries (Greece, Poland and Slovenia) the NSO operates within a national agency or institution which works closely with the national Ministry.

At a meso level, references and/or links to eTwinning in **national official documents** such as legislation, ministerial circulars, curricula, strategic frameworks and/or action plans have emerged as an indicator that reflects the embedding of eTwinning in national education systems. More specifically, eTwinning is clearly mentioned in national official documents in France, Greece, Slovenia and Poland.

With this approach, eTwinning constitutes an institutional recommendation – not an obligation – for teachers and schools that they can choose to implement in their teaching practice. However, in some countries (e.g., Finland, Portugal, Spain, Turkey) making concrete references to specific projects or actions in national documents is not a common practice and therefore eTwinning is not explicitly included. Nevertheless, in these countries there are descriptions of pedagogical and methodological approaches and tools that reflect the methodology and scope of eTwinning such as internationalisation, cross-curricular approaches, collaborative projects and digitalisation. In all cases, though, eTwinning is promoted as a soft tool that teachers and schools may benefit from.

Most of the countries in which the NSO operates within the national Ministry of Education make indirect references/links to eTwinning in their national official documents such as Finland, Spain and Turkey, while France and Portugal make direct references/links. On the other hand, all countries in which the NSO operates within a national agency or institution (e.g., Greece, Poland, Slovenia) make direct links and references to eTwinning in their national official documents. Regarding the last group of countries, a possible interpretation suggests that the integration of eTwinning in the national official documents aims at strengthening institutional collaboration with the national Ministry and promoting the embedding of eTwinning at a systemic level. Given the limited number of countries included in

the Report, a cross-check with quantitative data regarding the "penetration of eTwinning per country"[3] seemed to be precarious. Nevertheless, the qualitative data from the focus groups suggest that the governance structure may constitute one of the multiple contextual factors that affect the way and the extent to which eTwinning has been embedded at meso and macro level across national education systems.

Based on the focus group data, there are **several challenges** that countries face in their attempt to embed eTwinning in their national educational systems. These challenges can be systemised under four main categories:

1. The first one relates to **misconceptions about eTwinning** such as "eTwinning is for foreign language teachers", "you need to master a foreign language to participate", "eTwinning is for secondary education", "eTwinning is kids playing and learning".
2. The second category illustrates the **contextual factors which hinder the uptake of eTwinning** that are generated by three main factors. The first one relates to the constant national educational reforms that cause difficulties in implementing eTwinning, while the second refers to national educational approaches such as the existence of well-structured textbooks that lead to textbook- and subject-based learning and teaching.

3 Central Support Services (2021). eTwinning Trends 2005-2020. Internal document.

The third factor stems from to the lack of Internet and equipment in many regions, especially in rural areas.

3. The third category of challenges relates to **going beyond 'pioneers'**. Based on the focus groups, eTwinners are the most active and innovative teachers and it is therefore really difficult to expand eTwinning and engage teachers who prefer more traditional teaching approaches. In this regard, a similar challenge in some countries is to persuade school principals to allow their teachers to implement eTwinning projects in their schools.
4. The fourth category of challenges relates to **funding, visibility** and **the gap between Erasmus+ and eTwinning**. That is to say, the connection of eTwinning with Erasmus+ is not always visible across countries, an element which affects the embedding of eTwinning at a national level. Another challenge that is more relevant to visibility is that the potential of eTwinning is not fully understood by ITE institutions, while the lack of recognition for teacher educators hinders the embedding of eTwinning in tertiary education in several countries.

The participants of the focus groups have also identified **further actions and the kind of support needed** to strengthen eTwinning and further embed it in their national educational systems. Some indicative actions suggest that:

- practical materials (good practices, kits, videos, lesson plans) that indicate how eTwinning can be integrated across school subjects should be created and promoted for all school levels including Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and Vocational Education and Training (VET).
- eTwinning Ambassadors should be supported, while school principals and directors should be informed.
- eTwinning should be approached in conjunction with other projects and activities and promoted as a bigger "package".
- eTwinning would benefit from synergies with local authorities (regional international relations offices,

municipalities) and/or other national stakeholders (institutes, associations).
- the promotion of eTwinning Schools (schools awarded the eTwinning School Label) should be strengthened to reflect that they are not just schools in which eTwinning projects are implemented.
- the visibility of eTwinning should be further implemented in national official documents.
- eTwinning should be introduced in initial training for teachers, but also in initial and continuous training of school heads and school inspectors.
- future teachers, teacher educators and ITEs should be recognised for their work.

Based on the collected data it is suggested that **further support** should target the valorisation of eTwinning in Erasmus and their linked connections especially with Key Action 1 (KA1). eTwinning could also be promoted again as a tool that contributes to the Erasmus+ accreditation process at European level, considering that eTwinning supports many of the quality criteria. Moreover, eTwinning could be one of the indicators for assessing digital or ICT-related activities in schools (e.g., combining it with SELFIE) or use the eTwinning Quality Labels with other labels (e.g., Safer Internet) to contribute to the digital strategy of the school. Additional areas of support that emerged include:

- European training for school leaders;
- provision of incentives to teachers and ITEs for their engagement with eTwinning;
- a user-friendly and easy-to-navigate platform connecting other European programmes and operating as a single access point;
- increasing the number of staff to allow a school system-wide approach;
- organising a conference just for policy makers, maybe combined with EMINENT;[4]
- European frameworks for developing synergies with other bodies and stakeholders in order to safeguard and maintain the status of eTwinning.

4 EMINENT stands for "Experts Meeting in Education Networking", an annual event organised by European Schoolnet. Further information can be found at: http://www.eun.org/eminent

3. Impact of embedding eTwinning on national policies

The present chapter illustrates the key findings of the collected data on the impact of embedding eTwinning on national policies and specifically regarding professional development and recognition, curriculum integration and innovative pedagogy.

3.1. Professional Development and Recognition

The area of professional development and recognition explored the actions that the countries have developed for improving teachers' professionalisation and recognition, including both initial training and continuous professional development, as well as the impact of eTwinning on reshaping teachers' image.

First, eTwinning has impacted teachers' professional development in terms of **introducing internationalisation in teachers' careers** by promoting their personal/professional development through international activities and events that connect teachers throughout Europe. For instance, in Finland, a Finnish pyramid model is used to describe schools' internationalisation. eTwinning is a tool for internationalisation supporting students and teachers to promote their intercultural competence and benefit from an international activity. In Greece, the Annual Circular that is distributed to all schools stresses that eTwinning can promote teachers' international professional development through the different eTwinning offers, as does the report of the French General Inspectorate. In Portugal, a recent research study suggests that eTwinning and eTwinning groups contribute positively to teachers' professional development, and the same is evident in the Turkish impact study. Similarly, a Slovenian national study concluded that eTwinning impacted teachers' international collaboration in a significant way.

Moreover, eTwinning has **inspired a new set of activities that promote teachers' professional development** such as national eTwinning conferences, seminars, webinars and annual courses. For instance, in the focus groups it was reported that webinars seemed to be an effective way of delivering professional development offers in Finland and Slovenia, something that will become a permanent activity in the post-Covid area. According to the Turkish focus group,

webinars and MOOCs were first introduced in teachers' professional development by eTwinning, while other ministerial policies regarding teacher training were also impacted, such as the upcoming EdTech hub, an educational technology ecosystem based on teachers' networks. Greece has also been organising the annual national eTwinning conference and is about to launch a new MOOC platform offering annual courses on pedagogy and distance learning, as well as a scientific journal for teachers to present and disseminate eTwinning innovations. Similarly, in Portugal, there are two different MOOCs, one for beginners and another for more advanced teachers, with a high rate of completion.

Additionally, during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020-2021, eTwinning **expanded the professional development opportunities** through webinars and other learning events, supporting teachers in their the offline-online transition. According to the focus group input, the French NSO has organised approximately 80 webinars, and similarly in Slovenia there was a great response with more than 1,000 participants attending webinars. In Portugal, the NSO has organised approximately 53 webinars supporting more than 1,000 teachers during the pandemic, attracting more and more participants. The success of these webinars made them part of the monthly activity schedule. Likewise, the Greek NSO, with the support of the Ministry, organised more than 84 webinars during the pandemic, to support teachers in their work, and the same applies for Turkey, where more than 1,000 courses were organised by ambassadors and more than 100,000 teachers were trained through webinars by the Turkish NSO. In this regard, the focus group data show that **eTwinning teachers were better prepared to cope with the pandemic and emergency remote teaching**. In fact, the Polish national study "Teachers Online" confirms this assumption by providing evidence on the impact of eTwinning on teachers regarding the use of digital tools and online teaching during the pandemic, as well as on the expansion of professional development. During pandemic time March 2020 – May 2021 the Polish NSO trained 22,763 teachers within the specially dedicated campaign "Distance Education with eTwinning", including various

forms of online training (workshops, seminars, courses on Moodle platforms, regional workshops, regional conferences). Considering the above, teachers' **professional development and digital competence have been directly impacted by eTwinning**. In this regard, eTwinning is compatible with the Portuguese policy for developing teachers' digital competences, as well as the upcoming Slovenian Action Plan on Digital Education and the Greek Action Plan for Digital Skills.

eTwinning has also contributed to **reshaping the image of teachers** in the school and the wider local community. In the majority of the countries, it was highlighted that eTwinning teachers are particularly **appreciated by parents, pupils**, **other teachers, headteachers and the Ministry**, and to a certain extent by the wider local community, because of their dedication and their less traditional approach to project work and learning. One way of showcasing this appreciation might be through the recognition that eTwinners receive for their work. The **majority of the countries seem to have already established processes for recognising eTwinning** activities at national level, although several differences can be observed since national/regional institutional structures vary across countries. More specifically, it has been noted that when eTwinning is recognised, this may be either **formally or non-formally accompanied by a certain type of reward** (e.g., salary, promotion, positive non-formal impact on evaluation).

For instance, in France, eTwinning training opportunities are **officially included** in the training plans of the regional education authorities called Academies, while in Slovenia, eTwinning Learning Events (short online courses), webinars and other similar training opportunities have recently been officially recognised by the national system. In Spain, many regions have included the recognition of eTwinning in teachers' careers, although each autonomous community has its own "internal" processes for this. In Portugal, there is an established system for recognising teachers' professional development with the support of an external council that performs checks on the content of the training. In Slovenia, teachers need to collect a certain number of points for their **career development** and eTwinning provides these points, depending on the project duration. Additionally, eTwinning ambassadors receive these points. Therefore, eTwinning contributes to **teachers' promotion** (teacher, mentor, adviser) and in the end to a higher salary. Similarly, in Spain, eTwinning helps teachers to acquire points/credits, which leads to a modest **increase in their salary**. By contrast, in France eTwinning does not provide any benefits in terms of promotion or salary, although participating in eTwinning projects is viewed favourably in teachers' career advancement interviews. In Poland, teachers need to meet certain obligations for their career progression (e.g., widening the scope of school activities, being the coordinator of an international project, etc.) and eTwinning meets all these requirements.

In Greece, eTwinning professional development is **not officially linked** to teachers' evaluation, but eTwinning projects are recognised and give extra points in assessment of teachers' projects. Likewise, in France, eTwinning is appreciated in the evaluation performed by headteachers and inspectors, while in Poland, the eTwinning portfolio is frequently used in teachers' evaluation to provide evidence to the headteacher, the regional authorities (representatives of the city) and/or the regional centre. By contrast, in Finland there are **no credits for professional development** activities at all and therefore none for eTwinning. In Turkey, the Ministry used to provide teachers with 15 points for the national or European Quality Label, but with a recent reform, this is no longer applicable. Yet other types of "unofficial" recognition might include the organisation of special award ceremonies to recognise teachers' efforts and provide motivation to beginners, where the District Governor awards the certificates.

Regarding **recognition in Initial Teacher Education**, the majority of the countries indicated that there is no official recognition and/or reward for ITE staff involved in working with eTwinning. In cases where eTwinning is not officially embedded in the curriculum, students receive a certification from the professors, which has however no official impact. In this regard, introducing eTwinning into ITE is a relatively new endeavour in these countries. In conjunction with the university and school closures due to the pandemic, the data obtained from the focus groups provide some initial indications of the countries' experience so far. That is to say, that all countries reported a **growing interest and response from several national institutions** to join eTwinning and that therefore a slow but clear progression can be observed.

3.2. Curriculum Integration

The area of curriculum integration explored the impact of eTwinning on aspects that fall under the topics of internationalisation of the curriculum, pupils' key competences and school leadership.

All countries participating in the current monitoring report indicated that eTwinning is **informally integrated in the official curriculum** through topics such as international collaborative projects, European dimension, languages, digitalisation, project-based learning, key competences, and cross-curricular teaching and learning. Therefore, it can be suggested that these **contextual links strengthen and facilitate the integration of eTwinning in the school curriculum**, promoting innovation and internationalisation in school teaching and learning. In Poland, however, this link has been formalised since 2017, when eTwinning was directly and explicitly included in the new curriculum for modern foreign language teaching. Based on the focus group data, in cases where **curriculum development is subject to public consultation**, eTwinners may be among those who suggest and integrate several methodological elements (e.g., project-based approaches, international collaborative projects, digital tools) that they may have learned from eTwinning. This seems to be evident in the personal experience of one ambassador in Finland who proposed modifications in the curriculum, as well as of some ambassa-

dors and eTwinning teachers in Slovenia. Additionally, in Slovenia some ambassadors and eTwinning teachers are also involved in the taskforces that prepare the teachers' books, so they can, to a certain extent, embed new features that they learn from eTwinning.

In addition, eTwinning also **contributes to implementing the key competences and competence-based approach** of the Finnish, Polish, Spanish and Portuguese national core curricula. Moreover, a Slovenian impact study concluded that eTwinning has become a constant feature of schools' annual work plans with the aim of improving the efficiency and quality of the education process within and outside the curriculum. In other cases, **eTwinning is reinforced through ministerial circulars and national guides** regarding, internationalisation and language learning (e.g., Finland and France), citizenship education (Portugal) and other curricular (e.g. "Skills Workshops" or extracurricular activities in schools (Greece). In Turkey, some school textbooks include the eTwinning logo, while the eTwinning Quality Label emerges as a lever for integrating eTwinning in the curriculum.

Based on the focus groups' contributions, integrating eTwinning in the school curriculum is associated with **multilevel benefits regarding pupils' key competences**, learning, motivation and wellbeing. For instance, the focus groups reported that pupils' **multilingual competence** is improved as they feel less insecure while using a foreign language and learn from one another while communicating. This active use of foreign languages contributes to students' literacy and multilingual competence. In relation to the **cultural awareness and expression competence**, eTwinning offers the opportunity to communicate with other pupils from Europe. Through such interactions, pupils' minds are broadened towards others; they gain knowledge of different cultures and languages and develop respect for other people's rights. Pupils' **digital competence** has also been impacted in terms of using various digital tools for learning and expressing themselves. Indeed, it was reported that teachers sometimes discover their pupils' abilities through eTwinning. Pupils' competence

development is further validated by the consistency of eTwinning with the national curricula, as well as by additional evidence that acknowledges the impact of eTwinning on pupils. Indicatively, the French guide for teaching modern foreign languages makes explicit reference to eTwinning projects and intercultural exchanges for promoting linguistic, cultural and digital competences. In Greece, a 2020 research study concluded that eTwinning enhances pupils' digital, cultural, civic and linguistic competences, as well as their collaborative and social skills. The Polish study on the meaning of eTwinning and the Slovenian impact study both illustrate the contribution of eTwinning to pupils' key competences development.

At the ITE level, some institutions of the countries involved in this report have already **embedded eTwinning in their undergraduate and/or postgraduate curricula**, either as an autonomous elective course, or as a topic in lectures of other courses or **as a research topic** in students' Master's dissertation**,** while they carry out eTwinning projects. Based on the focus group data, the integration of **eTwinning in ITE curricula has impacted future teachers** by promoting the competences already referred to (multilingual, cultural awareness, etc.). According to the Polish focus group, eTwinning has a positive effect on students who want to take part in their university's Erasmus+ programme, as they have gained international experience before their actual physical mobility. Additionally, future teachers in Slovenia, Spain and Portugal feel more confident as they can apply what they learn (digital tools and pedagogical methodologies) right at the beginning of their career. As described by the Polish ITE representative,

> *"eTwinning promotes self-learning, self-regulation and self-evaluation for students, elements that are essential for those who want to become good teachers"*

School leadership has also been acknowledged as an important factor with regard to integrating eTwinning in schools. Based on the collected data, school leaders (principals, headteachers, directors) emerge as the main lever of support for the achievement of eTwinning projects. Although eTwinning can be implemented without the support of the school leaders, according to participants' views, when school leaders are committed to the project **the**

impact is greater with longer-lasting effects on schools, as stated in the Portuguese and Slovenian focus groups. Specifically, the Portuguese NSO invites headteachers and mentors (eTwinning coordinator in each school) from schools with the eTwinning School label, to a monthly meeting to support and spread the eTwinning practice in classrooms. This initiative has been very well received by schools and has positive results that are reflected in greater numbers of projects and teachers by these schools.

In general, most school leaders are positively disposed to and warmly support eTwinning, especially those who have a keen interest in improving the internationalisation activities of their schools. Hence, the Greek annual Ministerial Circular clearly states that school leadership should facilitate and support teachers implementing eTwinning projects. Likewise, the Slovenian guide suggests that the eTwinning team should consist of the school management and the school staff, while the Erasmus+ guide acknowledges the supportive role of school principals. According to the Polish eTwinning survey, school principals disseminate information about eTwinning, while in France eTwinning is presented in headteachers' initial training. The Turkish eTwinning impact study stresses the encouraging role of the school administration in supporting teachers in project work and the use of technology.

3.3. Innovative Pedagogy

The area of innovative pedagogy explored the impact of eTwinning on aspects of topics such as the European dimension, methodological and pedagogical upskilling for schools and teachers, and pupils' motivation. It should be noted that in the majority of the focus groups, it was stated that **innovation refers to approaches and practices which teachers have not used in the past**, or at least not in the same way. Therefore, innovation is highly diversified, since teachers and conditions in classes, schools and educational systems differ across countries. For instance, the rapid switch to remote teaching during the pandemic was an innovation for many teachers, if not for all.

According to the data obtained from the focus groups, eTwinning provides teachers with **autonomy, flexibility and openness** in terms of collaborating with other colleagues, both at school and European level, as well as of implementing their national curricula.

More specifically, eTwinning allowed teachers and schools to open up to the local community, as well as to the wider European community, by **developing synergies and engaging other stakeholders**. For instance, a Finnish study on global education as part of the Finnish basic education acknowledges the contribution of eTwinning as a cross-border activity reported both by teachers and pupils. Additionally, the French teachers' guide suggests eTwinning as a way of finding European partners and setting up exchanges.

Concurrently, it was stressed that eTwinning offers pupils and teachers the opportunity to meet, communicate and collaborate with their peers from other countries. The **public image of schools** has been also reported to be positively impacted by integrating eTwinning in schools in general, as well as the **awarded-receiving eTwinning Schools and the values that they reflect**. In some countries, internationalisation is increasingly featured as an asset that is favoured by parents and students. Hence, in some cases, eTwinning features as an added value in school activities in order to attract new students (e.g., Poland, Turkey), or to promote education at a municipality level (e.g., Spain). The eTwinning National Quality Label and the eTwinning School flag (given to eTwinning Schools) constitute the two main ways of raising visibility, while in some events and award ceremonies, regional and local broadcasters, newspapers and social media groups acknowledge eTwinning activities and schools' accomplishments. eTwinning contributes both to opening schools to the local society and to schools' internationalisation as reflected in the national objectives of Finland, France, Slovenia, Greece, Poland, Portugal and Spain.

Additionally, eTwinning has impacted teaching practices by introducing **cross-curricular and inter-disciplinary approaches** in everyday teaching. In some countries, this has been acknowledged as a revolution, especially in cases where teachers rely heavily on textbooks (e.g., in Portugal and Greece). However, some teachers still encounter difficulties in adopting such approaches or prefer the traditional textbook approach. Based on the focus groups, eTwinning is perceived as a **"flexible" methodology** that teachers can implement in their classrooms, having a direct influence on their pupils through different pedagogical approaches. Besides, this flexibility constitutes a component of national approaches regarding teachers' autonomy and curriculum flexibility (e.g., in Finland, Greece, Portugal).

Additionally, several **pupil-centred and collaborative pedagogical approaches** were introduced by eTwinning projects and professional development opportunities, nudging teachers to implement them in their non-eTwinning projects and eventually in their main teaching practice. In this regard, in the focus groups, the participants made several references to project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning and flipped learning. These findings seem to be in line with the Finnish national curriculum, which lays emphasis on pupils' active involvement and pupil-teacher interaction, with the Portuguese Decrees (Law 54 and 55) and the Student Profile for Compulsory Education, as well as with the Turkish 2023 Education Vision, which sets students' learning at the centre and reinforces pupil-centred methodologies. Also, the French proposal for foreign languages learning reports that pupils' motivation for learning new languages is promoted when learning is linked to projects. Additionally, both a Slovenian and a Greek study and the Polish report conclude that eTwinning has a positive effect on changing teachers' way of teaching by introducing more innovative pedagogical practices.

Another area where the focus groups mentioned eTwinning as having a direct effect was that of pupils' motivation, and in this regard, we attempted to identify any potential link between eTwinning and early school leaving. The focus group data indicate that **eTwinning increases pupils' motivation, energy and commitment for eTwinning projects, but also for other school subjects.** This is evident due to the integration of their ideas and interests, their high involvement and engagement in the learning process, and the opportunity to connect what they learn with their everyday life, contributing to authentic, social and situated learning. Nevertheless, although eTwinning raises pupils' motivation, it would not be safe to reach a conclusion on the direct effects of eTwinning on early school leaving, as there is no official evidence supporting this assumption. Additional national evidence confirms that eTwinning is considered a successful activity that raises pupils' motivation for learning, according to indicative findings of Finnish, French, Greek, Polish, Spanish, Slovenian, Portuguese and Turkish studies and reports.

Concluding remarks

This report shows that eTwinning has gained some important ground towards a more systemic approach being officially adopted at national level. Among the countries analysed, ***eTwinning is embedded to varying degrees*** *in national educational policies; both the way and the extent that eTwinning is – or can be – embedded depend strongly on additional national contextual factors (e.g., legal, political, cultural). Yet,* ***eTwinning's consistency with the scope and/or the content of national educational policies and curricula****, although present in many cases, can be further strengthened so that eTwinning can be better embedded in national systems or better aligned with national policies.*

When attempting to embed eTwinning in national policies, the countries **encountered challenges** such as misconceptions about eTwinning, the expansion of eTwinning beyond pioneer teachers, contextual factors (e.g., educational reforms), as well as funding and visibility in relation to Erasmus+. In this regard, some **further actions that could tackle these challenges** include giving further support to eTwinning Ambassadors, teachers and school heads, promoting eTwinning in national official documents, developing synergies with local authorities and national stakeholders, and promoting eTwinning as a bigger "package", in conjunction with other projects and activities. For instance, improvements are needed in cooperation and coordination between the Erasmus+ National Agencies and the eTwinning National Support Organisations to better promote and implement the links between Erasmus+ and eTwinning, to better valorise eTwinning components of Erasmus+ projects, and to foster better understanding of Erasmus+ opportunities by eTwinning users (particularly new opportunities for accreditations).

Regarding the three impact areas, eTwinning contributes to **teachers' professional development** by supporting the competence development of teachers, particularly in the area of 21st-century skills and internationalisation in their careers. eTwinning has also inspired countries to develop a new set of professional development activities at national level and expand their offers, as in the case of the pandemic. Yet, although eTwinning activities are officially recognised in the majority of the countries examined, rewards may be either formal or informal. With regard

to ITE, all participating countries indicated that there is a growing interest and response by the institutions and future teachers.

As far as **curriculum integration** is concerned, eTwinning is officially integrated in the Polish curriculum and unofficially integrated in all the other countries. This integration is reflected in alignment of eTwinning with broader topics and objectives, as well as with the competence-based approach of some national curricula. Hence, the role of school leadership has been acknowledged as an important factor that facilitates eTwinning in schools. Additionally, eTwinning is also embedded in the undergraduate and/or postgraduate curricula of some ITE institutions, positively impacting participants' key competences by offering opportunities for international collaboration and interaction. This impact is also evident in school students.

The focus groups reported that eTwinning has also impacted **teachers' pedagogical practices** and introduced innovative pupil-cantered and collaborative approaches that raise pupils' motivation, elements which are in line with national educational policies. eTwinning also provides teachers with autonomy, flexibility and openness in terms of collaborating with other teachers at international level and developing synergies with other stakeholders in their practice, which is again in line with national objectives in the majority of the countries. Moreover, the award-receiving eTwinning Schools have impacted the public image of schools in general regarding openness, internationalisation and the values they reflect.

Finally, some trends/patterns identified across countries show an unofficial integration of eTwinning in the national curricula in the majority of the countries. However, several countries also strengthen and promote eTwinning at national level by explicitly including it in ministerial circulars and national action plans/strategies. In those cases where making concrete references to specific projects is not a common practice, eTwinning is indirectly linked to further policy objectives, such as in professional development, curriculum integration and innovative pedagogy.

In this respect, eTwinning complements and supports teachers' needs, curricular objectives, both in school education and ITE, and introduces innovative approaches that foster pupils' participation, motivation and learning.

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For the last 17 years, eTwinning has grown from a grassroots initiative into an active schools' community which has involved, since its launch, more than 937,000 teachers working in more than 217,000 schools across 43 countries. Funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ programme, eTwinning provides a safe digital platform, where teachers are engaged in various activities: from the design and implementation of European collaborative projects to networking, from participation in virtual groups to professional development and peer-learning.

eTwinning, through its platform available in 30 languages, provides a range of resources and learning opportunities for teachers. Indicatively, topics of these resources include the benefits of engaging with eTwinning, 21st-century skills, use of ICT in education, project kits for inspiration and guidance. Registered teachers have access to eTwinning Live, a restricted area of the platform with more advanced features and possibilities of the eTwinning community. Alongside this, teachers may participate in professional development activities that are offered at national level and focus on fostering their pedagogical, collaborative and digital competences.

At European level, eTwinning is coordinated, on behalf of the European Commission, by the Central Support Services managed by European Schoolnet, a consortium of 32 Ministries of Education. At national level, the National Support Organisations (NSO) promote eTwinning by offering a range of communication and learning activities and provide guidance and support to end-users.

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